



PARENT *handout*

Let's Play Outside!

Playing in the great outdoors allows your child to use her large muscles and exercise her balance skills. It gives her brain practice coordinating messages from different sources – muscles, senses, and balance. Another benefit is the stress release that comes from just being in nature.

Your yard, neighborhood, playgrounds, and parks provide lots of hands-on experiences that stimulate your child's senses as well as introduce her to science and math fun. (Since tasting opportunities abound outside as well, you will need to watch what she puts in her mouth!)

Ideas for outdoor fun

Ball play is much better outdoors than indoors, since your child has fewer rules to follow about dropping, throwing, and kicking.

A grassy surface can provide a “user-friendly” place to practice and fall as children learn to walk or run after a ball. It also makes a comfy seat for babies when rolling a ball back and forth.

A **nature walk** through your neighborhood will introduce you and your child to new sights, sounds, and smells. Name the things you look at or touch. Listen for sounds – animals, birds, the wind, your feet on gravel. Talk about what they are. Bring along a small bag to collect interesting leaves, rocks, acorns, and other items your child finds.

Sand play is a wonderful sensory activity once your child is no longer putting everything into her mouth. She will explore the texture, size, color, shape, and smell of sand as she digs, fills, dumps, pours, and stirs it.

Water play can be a way to escape from the heat. A sprinkler or hose is exciting for a toddler to run through! Babies may enjoy sitting near the sprinkler and feeling the spray. A sturdy tub or pool filled with water can provide endless hours of discovery.

Tips for playing outdoors

Your child may prefer unstructured play when she is outdoors. This allows her freedom to spend as much or as little time as she likes exploring an object or activity.

Let your child take the lead and decide on the rules (within the bounds of safety). This helps her develop self-esteem and self-image.

> Take your time.

Your child has a lot of information from her senses to process. She also may have many questions about the things she is experiencing.

> Stay safe.

Dress for the weather, with warm coats or sunscreen. Keep a close eye on your child, especially around busy streets or water.

> Feel the bonding.

Shared experiences in nature increase parent-child interaction. This can improve your child's emotional health and encourage your nurturing parenting behaviors.



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Your child will explore things that sink or float, containers that hold or leak water, or toys that move when water is poured on them (water wheel). Note: Never leave your child unattended around water.

As you play together, talk about what she is doing and use words such as, wet, pour, in, out, empty, and full.

Catching bubbles encourages visual tracking and eye-hand coordination. Show your child ways to play with bubbles. Blow bubbles for her and encourage her to catch them, clap them, and step on them (if she misses them in the air). Wave the wand to show her how to make a bubble come off. An older child might even try to blow her own.

Chunky sidewalk chalk is just the right fit for your child's small hands. There is no limit to the size of your outdoor "chalkboard" if you have a driveway or sidewalk nearby! Show your child how to use the chalk, tell her what you are drawing, and encourage her to make her own designs. Talk about how the chalk feels and how it can be "erased" with a splash of water.